

CHAIN PICKEREL — NORTHERN PIKE — TIGER MUSKELLUNGE

Know How To Tell The Difference!

The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife has been stocking Northern Pike and Tiger Muskellunge in selected waters around the Commonwealth for more than 20 years. It is important for anglers to be able to identify these two species, and particularly to distinguish them from the common Chain Pickerel, which has a shorter minimum harvest length. The following illustrations and guidelines should allow any angler to readily distinguish between these three members of the esocid family. Be aware that there is great variability in color pattern among individual fish of the same species, but in general if you can just remember “chain” for pickerel, “spots” for pike, and “stripes” for tiger, you should have little difficulty distinguishing these three esocids from one another.



Chain Pickerel (Minimum Length : 15 inches)

Dark chain-like pattern over a green to yellowish background
Dark vertical bar extends from eye to bottom of cheek
Gill cover fully scaled



Northern Pike (Minimum Length : 28 inches)

Dark green background with light, oblong, often bean-shaped spots
Only upper half of gill cover scaled



Tiger Muskellunge (Minimum Length : 28 inches)

Dark, irregular, often broken vertical bars over a pale green to yellowish background
Only upper half of gill cover scaled